

Exhibit No. 7Date 3-18-11Bill No. HB 2State-funded tobacco-prevention program on the chopping block

By MIKE DENNISON Gazette State Bureau The Billings Gazette | Posted: Wednesday, March 9, 2011

HELENA — University of Montana sophomore Bambi Erving says the state's anti-tobacco programs not only convinced her to quit smoking but also helped turn her life around at age 15.

Erving, of Plains, had left her family's troubled home to move into a trailer house with other teenagers and young adults, where she said drug, alcohol and tobacco use was the norm.

A high school counselor suggested that she get involved with reACT, a youth tobacco prevention program funded by state dollars that now are on the chopping block at the Legislature.

Erving agreed and attended a reACT summit in Bozeman, where she learned how corporate tobacco targets teenagers by convincing them tobacco use is an act of defiance.

It was as though her entire lifestyle and attitude had been scripted by the industry, to get her addicted to tobacco. "As a smoker and a defiant teen, I was pissed," she said.

Backers of reACT say it's one of the programs that will end if the Legislature goes through with cutting some \$15 million in tobacco prevention money from the state's two-year budget for 2012-13, as proposed so far.

Republicans on House budget panels have voted to remove this money and use it to finance other health care programs they say are a higher priority.

"Our job is to prioritize the needs of the people of Montana," said Rep. John Esp, R-Big Timber, a member of the House Appropriations Committee who worked on the human-service budget. "Actual, on-the-ground services for medically needy people are a priority."

Esp supported the move that shifted tobacco prevention money to cover a shortage in the state's share of Medicaid, the state-federal program that pays medical bills for the poor.

Democrats have opposed the move, saying enough state money exists to fund both. They also argue that the tobacco-prevention money was earmarked for that purpose by Initiative 149, the voter-passed measure in 2004 that increased state cigarette taxes \$1 a pack.

House Bill 2, which contains the reduction, is on the floor of the Montana House this week for debate and votes.

The tobacco cessation money currently funds reACT, which stands for "react against corporate tobacco," and numerous local programs across the state.

Erica Rollins, a city-county health official who coordinates Tobacco Free-Missoula County, said the program gets \$108,000 a year in state money. County officials are very supportive of the

program, but Rollins said she doubts they'd have the money locally to keep it going if state funding is cut off.

Rollins works extensively with local schools on youth anti-tobacco programs. She trains health education teachers on the latest tobacco-related health issues, marketing and products, works with students on identifying how they're the target of marketing, and meets with dental hygienists, public health nurses and others on "intervention" with their patients, to offer them help in quitting tobacco.

The tobacco industry spends \$33 million a year in marketing in Montana, and "they would just be free to go wild in our state" with no countervailing anti-tobacco program, she said.

Bill Phelps, a spokesman for the Altria Group in Richmond, Va., which makes Marlboro cigarettes and controls about half the tobacco market in the country, said he doesn't know how much the industry spends on marketing in Montana.

However, he said his company does not market to children or teenagers and limits its advertising to retail outlets and direct mail to adult users or those who've requested information.

"We believe that kids should not use tobacco products," Phelps said. "It's already illegal to sell tobacco products to minors."

Supporters of anti-tobacco programs say youth smoking and tobacco use are declining in Montana, and believe their programs are part of the reason. State tax data indicate that tobacco sales are declining slightly in Montana since peaking in 2008, after a brief rebound after the initial drop in the wake of the \$1.70-per-pack increase in taxes in 2005.

Erving, the UM sophomore, joined hundreds of anti-tobacco activists at the Capitol on Tuesday to rally for reinstating the tobacco prevention funding. She said she participated in reACT through high school, attending national conferences in Oklahoma City and Phoenix, and is still involved in related groups in college, working to make the UM campus tobacco-free.

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